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# **The Role of Adult Education and English Language Education in Nation-Building: A Case Study of the Emmanuel Bible Institute of Oradea, Romania**

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**Abstract: English as a language of theological instruction necessarily includes influential elements of Western Protestant styles of critical thinking. This study focuses on the role and implications of English as a foreign language at the Emmanuel Bible Institute in Oradea, Romania. The influence of English in theological development and subsequent nation building are also addressed.**

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of adult education and English language education in the development of Protestant theological education in one institution, the Emmanuel Bible Institute of Oradea, Romania. This study also examined the larger question of how adult education can effectively work to transform a society in the process of social and political change.

The countries of the former Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe provide contemporary contexts for the study of adult religious education's relationship to nation-building. Romania represents a most interesting context for this study given the events of the past decade. For 50 years, a particularly repressive Communist government ruled Romania. In spite of the government's ban on religious training, one of the first educational institutions to be organized after the 1989 revolution was a Protestant college and seminary, the Emmanuel Bible Institute of Oradea, Romania. What made this institution significant in the eyes of the researchers was its role in the development of an emerging democracy, and its voluntary dependence on curricular materials available primarily in English.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study reflects the blending of three major literature bases: 1) the adult education literature as it is reflected in the more individualistic notions of Knowles' (1980) concepts of andragogy and Mezirow's (1981) concept of perspective transformation, and Freire's (1970) more community-oriented notion of consciousness-raising and empowerment; 2) curriculum development literature as it is reflected in the works of Nunan (1988) who examines curriculum "in action;" and 3) the literature of English for specific purposes (ESP) as it is manifested in the teaching of theology and religious education in developing democracies.

Adult education literature. Knowles' (1980) well-known concept of andragogy, which focuses on the individual learner, is applicable to adult higher education and adult religious education in both formal and nonformal contexts. Knowles' understanding of adult learning theory and the nature of the learner offers broad guidelines for programs transitioning from teacher-directed to learner-focused program planning. This case study provides an opportunity to observe this transition in a cross-cultural context.

In addition, Mezirow's (1981) perspective transformation theory also provides focus on the individual learner who is encouraged to think critically about their own beliefs and about the implications for that individual's surrounding context. The argument is made that learners in the institution of this study are encouraged to think critically, to question, to reflect on practice, and to evaluate what they hear and see in the classroom with what they hear and see in the community. This approach tends to contradict the traditional paradigm of passive/non-critical thinker/responder which was promoted in the general education system under Communism. The role of English is also central in this discussion as it is the language most closely related to modern Western Protestant theology.

Weber (1930/1992) suggested that critical thinking resulted from the Reformation-rationalism and activism being part of Reformation theology. In light of the dominant Orthodox tradition in Romania, which represents a view of compliance, community, and tradition, this pragmatic/critical thinking paradigm creates a tension between traditional Eastern thought and rationalistic Western thought. Western approaches of this nature are coming from the administration and faculty of the institution, who are receiving doctoral degrees in English-speaking institutions in the West, as well as from Western guest-teachers.

Freire's (1970) community-oriented concept of conscientization admonishes the individual learner to move beyond personal realities and develop a consciousness which nurtures a vision for the broader context. Gilberg (1990) identifies this consciousness awareness as the most important issue facing the development of a democratic Romania.

Freire's related concept of praxis also finds a role in this discussion. He maintains that conscientization is only relevant when action is based on critical reflection. The implications for nation-building may seem obvious. As adult learners look critically at their own social situation, they are enabled to take action based on that reflection. However, action without reflection degenerates into mindless activism while reflection without action becomes verbalism (Freire, 1970). The difficult economic situation facing Romania may encourage some toward activism, while those committed to tradition and passivity may motivate others toward verbalism. Balance in the process may be difficult to maintain, but if critical thinking and democracy are to grow and flourish, balance must be maintained. This balance must be defined by the Romanians themselves.

Curriculum. Nunan (1988), who examines curriculum-in-action, offers a model which encourages critical reflection on the part of administrators and faculty who make curricular decisions. Through Freire's processes outlined above, critical reflection can be brought to bear on both the theoretical and applied aspects of curriculum at EBI. Through ethnographic observation

and interdepartmental interaction, better decisions can be made concerning course design and practical application of learning.

English Language Education. In regard to English as a foreign language, Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) learning-centered model can also contribute to the process of curriculum development. The input of learners' needs and uses of language for academic success can

promote a more integrated approach to teaching English, both for classroom participation and self-directed projects.

International ESL case studies, such as Baciou's (1998) study on teacher education needs in Romania, describe collaborative projects between East and West. Such partnerships illustrate important principles concerning constructive assistance from Western sources. In particular, traditional approaches to English education are transitioning to more humanistic modes, where administrators and teachers are developing learner-oriented approaches to course design.

### **Research Design**

There are two research questions which drove this study. The first question explores the various ways Emmanuel Bible Institute contributes to the rebuilding of Romanian society in the post-Communist era. The second question seeks to uncover the practical implications that require the use of English in the study of theology in a non-English speaking society. In addition, the opinions and attitudes of the people (administrators, faculty and students of the Institute) affected by the English language requirement are addressed.

The research design for this study required a methodology that is both comprehensive and descriptive. Within these parameters, the qualitative case study as described by Merriam (1998) was considered appropriate. Among the numerous variations of case study methodologies, the ethnographic case study was chosen as a primary method for this study. An important element of this approach is the inclusion of cultural and historical perspectives which were used to assist in interpreting the Romanian context.

Empirical data from this study were gathered using multiple data collection techniques in two locations, Oradea, Romania, and Wheaton, Illinois. These data were found in such sources as 1) documents; 2) class observations; 3) questionnaires; 4) audio-taped interviews with subjects from the faculty administration and student body of the Institute; and 5) field notes. The data analysis consisted of organizing verbal data, questionnaires, observations, documents, and field notes into categories and themes that reflect the research questions.

### **Results**

According to the data, apathy among the masses is deeply entrenched in the Romanian way of life. Foreign domination fostered this apathy while communism (1948-1989) extinguished remnants of civil society that existed between the two World Wars. One subject identified the communist approach as the "rape of the Romanian spirit." Gilberg (1990) reported that by the late 1980s atomization eventually broke down the cohesion in society and nearly destroyed the

civic consciousness of the Romanian people. Those who spoke out against the regime's policies were detained, imprisoned, deported, or in some cases killed.

Within one year after the Revolution, however, adult higher education became quickly diversified into public and private systems. Some 66 private institutions emerged beginning in 1990, changing the landscape of adult higher education. The emergence of these private institutions represents a move toward democratic forms of higher education, offering courses in business, modern languages and computer technology, as well as other areas.

The data suggest that perspective transformation has been an aspect of the adult education experience at EBI since 1990. Two significant sources which influence this transformation are identified in the data. These are 1) Romanian professors who have or are being educated in Western theological institutions, and 2) Western educators who guest-teach at EBI. Along with this transformation has also come a growing dependence on the English language for access to the literature base as well as for access to the guest professors, most of whom come from English language backgrounds. A core issue which students contend with is the dependence on English in the curricular materials related to the study of theology and Bible. However, the findings also suggest that the use of English exceeds the boundaries of theological studies to also include accessing the informational network and conversing with outsiders. Subjects also indicate that knowledge of English positively influences the democratic process in Romania by connecting its citizens to individual and institutional partners in the West who aid in the rebuilding of the country - a process that necessarily exposes Romanians to outside ideas, values, and thought patterns. Influences from the West have begun to break down centuries of isolation through the media of television, radio, computer technology, advertising, and foreign guests.

### **Implications**

This research is of value to those with broad interests in adult education throughout post-Communist Eastern Europe, and to those with specific interests in adult religious education among non-English-speaking students. Though limited to one institution, this study provides researchers with a case study of how a society experiences a national transformation, and the role of English in the development of belief structures of individual citizens as well as political structures of the country as a whole. Finally, the developments occurring in Romania suggest the need for further research into the role of adult education and the role of English as a foreign language in the transformation of social, educational, and political structures in other countries experiencing such dramatic change.

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